Probe of JFK Assassination

Unit to Question Dallas Agents

By Norman Kempster
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A House subcommittee investigating charges that the FBI withheld evidence from the Warren Commission plans to question agents from the bureau's Dallas office who had dealings with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Witnesses to be called by the Judiciary subcommittee to hearings later this month include James P. Hosty Jr., the FBI agent whose name appeared in Oswald's address book, and Gordon Shanklin, the special agent in charge of the Dallas office.

"We think everything should be laid out on the public record before everybody dies," Chairman Don Edwards, D-Calif., said in a telephone interview.

HOSTY HAS declined to discuss the matter in public in recent years even though his name figures in many of the perplexing questions that have been raised since the Warren Commission concluded that Oswald was the lone assassin.

Edwards said the Justice Department has agreed to permit Hosty, now assigned to the Kansas City office, to testify under oath. The chairman said he had been assured that Shanklin, who has since retired, also will appear.

In a session last month that raised far more questions than it answered, the committee was told by James B. Adams, deputy associate FBI director, that Hosty and Shanklin told directly contradictory stories to the bureau's internal investigation into the destruction of a letter Oswald delivered at the Dallas office a few days before the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination.

The FBI withheld information about the letter from the Warren Commission. The bureau confi84med reports about the letter only after they appeared in newspapers earlier this year.

ADAMS SAID Hosty said he destroyed the letter on Shanklin's instructions just two hours after Oswald was pronounced dead Nov. 24. But Adams said Shanklin said he knew nothing of either the receipt or the destruction of the letter.

Edwards said the committee decided that the only way to resolve the conflict was to question under oath Hosty, Shanklin, an office receptionist who saw the letter and others.

Receptionist Mancy M. Fenner said the letter contained a threat to blow up the FBI office and the Dallas police department if Hosty did not stop harassing Oswald's Russian-born wife, Marina. Hosty said the letter urged him to leave Marina alone but contained no threat.

In addition to the Oswald letter, Edwards said the committee plans to ask for additional information about the FBI's handling of Oswald's address book which contained Hosty's name, address and auto license number.

When the FBI originally sent the Warren Commission a memo on the contents of Oswald's address book, the reference to Hosty's name was omitted. When the commission staff asked about the omission, the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover said the original memo had contained only information that might provide leads. Since Hosty was well-known to the bureau, Hoover said, his name did not provide a lead to FBI investigators.

Kesler prepared the original memo which was later included in a longer memo by Gemberling. Gemberling said the first page of the Kesler memo was retyped to put it on plain paper instead of a memo letterhead to facilitate including it in his memo.

ACCORDING to Hoch, each page of Kesler's 30-page memo is numbered at the bottom except for the first, which Gemberling said was retyped, and page 25, where the Hosty reference would have appeared if the address book had been copied completely. Those two pages were numbered at the top of the page.

In addition, Hoch said, the margin at the bottom of page 25 is larger than the margin at the bottom of other pages in the memo.

Hoover's letter to commission general counsel J. Lee Rankin's questions about the Hosty reference was tart in tone. He insisted that the FBI had always "reported all available and relevant facts" to the commission. He said, "I trust that this letter and the enclosures thereto will satisfy the requirements of the commission."

Recently declassified minutes of the commission's executive sessions indicate that there was some reluctance to argue with the irascible FBI head. Apparently, the question of why Hosty's name was omitted from the original memo was not raised again. Probably the commission felt there was no need to pursue the issue further since the evidence was then in hand.

HOWEVER, the original memo did contain large amouts of extraneous information which was of doubtful lead value.

Edwards said of Hoover's explanation, "It isn't a satisfactory answer, of course."

Warren Commission critics who believe Oswald may have been an FBI informant frequently cite the fact that he had Hosty's name in the address book.

A private researcher, Paul L. Hoch of Berkeley, Calif., offers circumstantial evidence in an unpublished manuscript that a page of the FBI memo was retyped to remove Hosty's name.

Hoover and FBI agents John T. Kesler and Robert P. Gemberling all swore in affidavits to the Warren Commission that the reference to Hosty was not removed in an effort to mislead the commission.